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interviewing  
for  
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public welfare



# interviewing for staff selection in public welfare



Report of

The National Workshop on Interviewing for Staff Selection

held at The New York School of Social Work

New York, New York

August 23 - September 3, 1954

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF  
HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE  
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Bureau of Public Assistance  
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## Introduction

"Every great advance in science," Dr. John Dewey wrote in *The Quest for Certainty*, "has issued from a new audacity of imagination."

There is a touch of audacity of imagination in the experimental work which Professors Sidney Berengarten and Irene Kerrigan of the New York School of Social Work, Columbia University are stimulating the social work profession to do in raising the quality of its services. What these experimenters have started may have subtle but significant effects on the future of this profession and of others whose central purpose, like its own, is to help human beings with problems.

The social worker's job in large part is to help people with emotional and social problems in mobilizing their own capacities for solving their own problems. This calls for a degree of emotional maturity in the worker which is not learned from text books, or acquired solely on the job. A worker's way of responding to all of his life experiences, even from infancy, helps to shape or mar his capacity to work well with others.

How to gauge present and potential personal-social strength in persons wishing to enter the social work profession has long been a problem to the profession. Schools of social work, mindful of their obligations both to the profession and to candidates for admission to courses, have been concerned lest they encourage a student to prepare for the practice of a profession which is unsuitable to him. Similarly, State welfare agencies have sought improved methods of determining the degree of emotional maturity and the potentials for growth in persons applying to them for social work positions, for the dual purpose of raising the quality of service and of helping applicants to judge whether the work will be satisfying to them.

The 7-year Pilot Study on Selection, recently completed by Mr. Berengarten, as Director, and Mrs. Kerrigan, as As-



sistant Director, under the sponsorship of the New York School of Social Work, has blazed some trails which it is believed will lead to the criteria which the profession is seeking. A series of workshops for admissions personnel in the New York School and other schools of social work has since been held, making possible wide experimentation with the Pilot Study's recommendations.

Although the focus of that study was on the selection of students, many think its methods are equally appropriate and useful to agencies selecting persons for professional social work employment. Accordingly, our two Bureaus, to whom State agencies have repeatedly appealed for help in this area, organized a two-week Workshop on Selection, where agency staff could become familiar with and learn how to use the methods developed by the Pilot Study.

This workshop, made possible by a grant of funds from the Field Foundation, was attended by 29 representatives of 17 State welfare departments and of the two Bureaus. Happily, it was possible to obtain the leadership of Mr. Berengarten and Mrs. Kerrigan in planning, conducting, and reporting on the Workshop. Both generously gave consultation on the report that follows and approve the presentation of the content.

Interviewing candidates is as old, of course, as employment itself. Its use is standard practice by social work agencies. Under many State Merit Systems, the interview technique is used in various ways. The interview method evolved by the Pilot Study is not an entire innovation. Social work schools and agencies have always attempted, through person-to-person interaction, to get insight into the capacity of an applicant to meet their particular requirements. The new ingredients introduced by Mr. Berengarten and Mrs. Kerrigan are the use of interviewing to obtain greater insight into the personality organization of the applicant, and to help the applicant obtain a greater understanding of himself in relation to the professional requirements in education and practice. Already, some of the persons who attended the workshop, held by our two Bureaus, report that they are developing various devices for coordinating the results of this type of interviewing with those from other methods used under Merit Systems.

If the profession of social work is to recruit persons with suitable personality, much more than individual interviews are obviously called for. The profession has a big job to do in interpreting its work widely to students and workers if it is to attract the kind of applicants wanted.

The report of the Workshop on Interviewing and Selection was prepared by Bessie E. Trout, Consultant on Training and Staff Development, Division of Social Services, Children's Bureau.

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# interviewing for staff selection

## in public welfare



The public welfare agencies and the Bureau of Public Assistance and the Children's Bureau of the U. S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare have a common, vital stake in the calibre of persons who are providing social services to people. Moreover, the State agencies frequently request assistance in developing criteria and methods of interviewing prospective employees. For these reasons, the Bureaus arranged a workshop for selected staff members who had responsibility for the interviewing process as used in the selection of prospective employees and applicants for educational leave for professional study.

Experience has shown that professional knowledge alone does not assure competence in social work. State welfare agencies have long realized that certain personality qualities, such as ability to relate purposefully and with self-discipline to individuals and groups in a helping role, and emotional maturity and flexibility, are essential for successful performance in social work. An evaluation of these qualities should be made at the time an individual is selected for employment under a merit system or for educational leave for professional training. Experience has also shown that when staff do not have the personality traits essential for social work the quality of service is poor or uneven, the staff member benefits little from on-the-job training or from cumulative experience and turnover is high.

Turnover in personnel reduces the value of agency services. In child welfare for example, when a child has lost his family the worker may represent the only sustaining relationship that he has. In such instances, frequent changes not only defeat the purpose of the service but also make it impossible for the agency to test the validity of its treatment. In the public child welfare program in 1954, the separation rate among caseworkers who worked directly with children was approximately 31 percent. In 1954 the accession rate in the public assistance programs was approximately 25 percent.

One-fourth of the employees had been with their agencies for less than a year.

Personnel may be separated from an agency for many reasons. People retire or become ill. Losses like these cannot be prevented. But when such reductions are ruled out, together with those due to low salaries and unfavorable working conditions, there still remains a number of drop-outs who were poorly motivated workers and should not have been selected. The high rate of turnover is costly in terms of money and staff training, requiring continuous orientation and teaching of agency philosophy.

Work in public welfare agencies makes greater than usual demands on personality and this fact highlights the need for careful selection. The great emphasis placed on personal qualities is due to the following facts:

1. A worker in a public agency usually has responsibility for a wide range of services. For example, a public assistance worker may carry responsibility for the administration of funds providing financial and social services to persons receiving old age assistance, aid to the blind, aid to dependent children, aid to the permanently and totally disabled, and general assistance payments. A child welfare worker may give casework services to children living in their own homes; see a child and his family through separation; take responsibility for placing a child for adoption, for selecting families to give boarding care, or for determining when group care is needed, and in all these instances be responsible for the child's continuing care. He may study and treat delinquent children, serve as probation officer to the court, interpret the needs of children to citizens' community agencies, or participate in developing community resources to meet children's needs. To adapt to such a range of demands and to shift quickly and easily from one role to another requires a particularly well-balanced and stable personality.
2. The public assistance and the child welfare workers in rural areas frequently "work alone." Less professional supervision and fewer supporting resources, such as psychiatric consultation, child guidance clinics, and professionally competent co-workers, are available to him and this forces the worker to rely on his own judgment.

3. The community judges the value of a program by the performance of its workers, and for this reason an agency cannot afford the mistakes which would result from selecting workers without an adequate evaluation of their personalities.
4. The State is responsible for coverage of services. If trained social workers cannot be found, the State must employ the most competent persons available. In the State-wide public assistance programs, for example, caseworker positions must usually be filled by persons who are untrained and who must be selected on the basis of their potential rather than their demonstrated ability. It is especially important that such workers at least have the personal qualities necessary for social work performance.

In June 1954, agencies administering the public assistance programs employed about 35,500 persons in executive and casework positions and a few other professional workers such as statisticians, nutritionists, doctors, etc. Of this number, 25,400 were caseworkers providing direct services to approximately 5 million people, including almost 2 million children in the ADC and general assistance programs.

In June 1954 approximately 5,100 persons were employed full time in professional positions in the State and local public welfare programs which serve more than 273,000 children. These do not include 3,700 local probation officers providing direct services to delinquent children, or 2,600 social work personnel in institutions (public or private) giving services to 2,300 children, or social work personnel in private child welfare agencies.

In view of the far-reaching implications, for the agency, the clientele, and the community, of using better methods of selecting personnel it was fortunate that a long-term research project, the Pilot Study on Selection, was developed at the New York School of Social Work. The study's objective was to establish personality criteria for learning and performance in social work. Mr. Sidney Berengarten, Director of the Pilot Study, and Mrs. Irene Kerrigan, Associate Director, conducted three workshops in order to develop a corps of field admissions interviewers for the New York School of Social Work and member schools of the Council on Social Work Education. Because of their extensive experience in the interviewing and personality assessment program, Mr. Berengarten and Mrs. Kerrigan were invited to assume leadership responsibility for the National Workshop on Interviewing and



Staff Selection sponsored by the two Federal Bureaus. The two Federal Bureaus felt that a workshop under such leadership would advance the use of comparable methods in the selection of persons entering social work whether through schools or through agencies. Illustrative material, basic principles, and methods derived from the Pilot Study that related to the reality of interviewing for employment or for educational leave were made available to the workshop participants. Benefiting from the experience of previous workshops, the Bureaus agreed that a two-week time span was essential for a productive experience for the group.

The Workshop on Interviewing and Staff Selection was made possible through a grant of funds from the Field Foundation and was a joint project of the Children's Bureau and the Bureau of Public Assistance. In order that the State welfare agencies should derive the greatest benefit from this type of workshop, the Bureaus recommended that the following criteria be used in selecting the workshop members:

1. The person should be currently carrying, or expect to carry following the workshop, some responsibility for interviewing applicants for prospective employment or for educational leave grants.
2. He should have full professional social work education.
3. He should have had extensive experience in either student or worker supervision, or in worker consultation. It was self-evident that such essential personal qualities as warmth, acceptance, and emotional maturity should be considered in selecting a representative to attend the workshop.

Twenty-nine persons, representing seventeen States and the two Federal Bureaus, took part. By special request, one social-work officer from the U. S. Army was included. (See list of membership attached.) The workshop was held at the New York School of Social Work which made available its facilities.

## **Plan of Workshop**

One of the most important and fruitful aspects of the workshop -- the spirit and feeling of the group as they worked together under the inspiring leadership of Mr. Berengarten and



Mrs. Kerrigan -- is almost impossible to record. Since each member of the group came with a background of experience in interviewing and in assessing personality of candidates for employment, they were alert to the hazards involved in subjective responses and familiar with the inevitable anxieties that evaluations arouse. Consequently, the discussion moved quickly into their individual practices.

Members worked in an atmosphere of warm acceptance and dynamic professional guidance, which contributed to a feeling tone of freedom and naturalness and respect for other members of the workshop. They were able to look at their own performance searchingly and honestly within a framework of new ideas and to grow during the process.

Members of the workshop repeatedly commented on the value of the discussion in adding to their general professional competence, on the deepening of their understanding of underlying motivations, and on the enrichment of their diagnostic thinking. They found their convictions about human relations reaffirmed. The workshop opened many doors for future experimentation.

The importance of integrating content by actually "living through" the experience of interviewing was recognized as an essential part of the workshop experience. For this reason, each workshop participant interviewed at least two applicants for employment in public welfare agencies. These interviews were made possible by the cooperation of local public welfare agencies through whose efforts 20 persons, who were either prospective or recent provisional employees, volunteered to come to the workshop on three successive days for the interviews.

The major objective of the workshop was to clarify the purpose and content of the interview and the role of the interviewer, and to identify and evaluate methods of interviewing and assessing the applicant in terms of the personality qualities essential for social work.

The discussion fell generally into the following content areas:

1. The interviewer's role and involvement in the process; his responsibility to the agency, the applicant, the community, and the profession;
2. Areas of content needed to understand the personality equipment and motivation for successful performance

in social work; criteria used in personality assessment and applicant evaluation;

3. Methods and techniques of interviewing applicants; initiation of interview; diagnostic inferences as interview unfolds; specific ways of moving the interview forward; similarities and differences in assessing applicants for professional training and for employment as an untrained worker; principles of recording interviews.

In general, the first week was given over to a discussion of illustrative case material (appropriately disguised) consisting of recorded interviews with candidates drawn from the Pilot Study and related to the different content areas noted above. In the Pilot Study, these interviews were in a series of three. Each candidate had been interviewed by three people individually on different days, with no exchange of information between the interviewers. After all of the interviews were recorded and the assessment of personality prepared, with a prediction rating, the interviewers met for discussion and joint recommendation. If accepted the person interviewed was then followed through two years of school experience (including field work) and, if he graduated, through the first year or longer of his work experience. Method and content of interviewing were validated, therefore, by school and work experience. The interviews presented to the workshop members for their analysis dramatically highlighted not only the process of interviewing but the validity of early predictions tested by the candidates' subsequent performance.

The second week was focused largely on the actual interviewing of applicants for employment and discussion of these interviews in the light of principles brought out earlier. Each prospective employee was interviewed by three different participants of the workshop. No information was exchanged between the workshop interviewers prior to the completion of the series. The interviews were recorded immediately with an evaluation added after the interviewers had had time to assess the content of the interview, formulate a recommendation, and arrive at a prediction as to ultimate performance in social work. Following this, the three interviewers discussed the series of interviews as a group, with a leader drawn from the Pilot Study's own panel of interviewers. This discussion centered around the content elicited and its meaning, the interviewing techniques, and evaluation of the employee's personality equipment and his potentialities for success in a public welfare agency. Finally, a recommendation was agreed upon by the group.

From these small group discussions significant cases were selected by the leaders for presentation and analysis to the total workshop group. Interspersed through all of the discussions was the applicability of the findings to the "every day" setting of a public welfare program. The question "would you employ this person (and why)" was tested out in each case. At the close of the workshop, condensed summaries of the three interviews were prepared by the leaders and sent to the employing agency. It had been agreed in advance with the agency (and this was understood by the person interviewed) that the agency would be free to use or not use the recommendations from the workshop as one part of the total body of information considered in making a final decision as to employment placement of the person within the agency program.

## **The Interviewer's Role**

The interview with an applicant was recognized as only one factor in a total process of selection, to be considered along with other information available to the agency. In anticipating interviewing, Mr. Berengarten pointed out that in this intensive kind of analysis of the interviewing process, interviewers become sensitive to their own subjective responses and more aware of the likelihood of over-estimating or under-estimating the individual, both in guiding the interview and in the evaluation process. As a consequence, the interviewer may become anxious, but this anxiety can have value if it helps him mobilize his energies to overcome a known obstacle. As a result he will be less likely to rely on habit and intuition and be stimulated to analyze the motivation for each step. This will help him re-acquaint himself with what he is doing and why.

Interviewing applicants for employment was recognized as different from interviewing applicants who come for some kind of personal help. Applicants for employment are not seeking help; rather they want to give help. The interviewer must be able to relate to the applicant in the light of this interest. In a broad sense, the interviewer represents the agency, the profession, and, indirectly, the community.

The workshop group discussed the kinds of problems they face in interviewing for agency staff selection. As staff members of public welfare agencies, they are under considerable pressure to fill vacancies. Because they have relatively few

applicants from whom to choose, they often feel that they should not be too rigid in their standards. The fact that existing staff must carry the load of unfilled positions increases this pressure. Selection can be made only from the merit system list and this further limits the choice. The fact that the interviewer is thinking of a particular position in the agency or a particular geographical location, such as a very rural area, frequently influences his decision. Occasionally an agency selects for a specific kind of position in which a given applicant may be able to function fairly well even though he could not qualify for other positions. It was pointed out that the practice of employing persons who cannot work or progress in other positions in the agency may have a stultifying effect on an agency.

The group accepted the premise that, as interviewers, they must first be clear as to the purpose in interviewing -- which is to assess what the applicant has within himself as an individual in terms of his capacity to carry out known agency services. Regardless of the agency or community setting, this assessment is fundamental.

Such assessment may reveal that many applicants are not able to meet the demands of helping others. If so, this would indicate the need for wider recruitment efforts on the part of the agency rather than the acceptance of workers unable to meet the needs people have for agency service. This principle was accepted as having equal validity for the applicant and the agency.

The interviewer's role in regard to the applicant who presents "risks" for successful performance is to secure deeper understanding of the applicant's demonstrated ability in order to gauge his use as a staff member. When the interviewer sees signs of limitations in personality, he must go on until he reaches an understanding of the meaning of these limitations for performance rather than let the applicant go on to experience failure that might be devastating to him. When risks are apparent, a prediction of these risks is not enough. Following acceptance for employment, the applicant must be placed in a work situation where he has the best possibility for success. For applicants recognized as risks, the six-months probationary period is useful for further clarification of what the applicant is able to do. The group stressed, however, that the probationary period should not be used in lieu of a thorough exploration and evaluation at the point of the initial interview. If this is done, the decision has merely been postponed and things are made more difficult later for both the agency and the applicant.



The value of the probationary period is that it offers the applicant an opportunity to try himself out. But once an agency makes a decision to accept an applicant with risks, it assumes the obligation of using, during the probationary period, the understanding gained from the initial interview, and of making the position an optimal one in terms of the applicant's strengths. The group repeatedly emphasized that the agency has a responsibility to the applicant as a human being and not merely as an employee of the agency.

The members of the workshop recognized that some persons can function only in a "niche" job or in a very protected setting. The hazards involved in employing a person who can be used only in one kind of position are obvious. As circumstances change, the worker tends to move into positions in which he cannot function -- to the detriment of everyone concerned. Schools of social work are questioning whether they are justified in accepting such a candidate for training and then presenting him to the community as a trained person. To demonstrate the validity of professional education, anyone graduating from a professional school should be sufficiently adaptable to function competently in a wide range of settings.

Questions were raised regarding the relation of these dynamic interviews with applicants to the evaluation of the merit system oral board as a part of the selection process. The group agreed that the purpose and method of the oral board differed so much from the personality interview that the one could not be substituted for the other. Two differences were cited: (1) The oral board, through structured methods, obtains for itself certain information about the individual. Unlike the interview under discussion, its purpose does not include an attempt to help the individual clarify for himself whether or not this work is right for him. (2) The oral board is a group, with its own particular focus, and cannot hope to elicit the personal content that an individual is able to reveal only through a supportive interpersonal relationship.

Since the kind of knowledge we need in understanding personality must represent the individual as he functions -- must show how he feels about his life experiences and how he is meeting them -- it can best be secured through a relationship in which the applicant has trust, and in which he is free to express himself naturally. The interview, therefore, should be free-flowing rather than structured, with a sense of direction running through it that is related to the purpose which both the agency and the interviewee have in mind.

The importance of the interpersonal relationship as demonstrated through the interviewer's role and activity was discussed. Through this demonstration the applicant begins to see what social work is like, what it means to relate oneself to individuals, and the kind of sensitiveness, understanding, and acceptance involved. This gives the applicant some understanding of what his relationships will be in helping others and a concept of the profession itself. The far-reaching importance of this initial meeting with the applicant was stressed. The applicant learns, through the quality of the relationship in the interview, the meaning of the good impulse to reach out to people. The interviewer demonstrates what the agency does and believes in by the way he performs. If the applicant does not sense the warmth and accrediting of the interviewer in the first interview, he may never believe that to relate to people warmly with acceptance, feeling, and understanding, is the warp and woof of agency services.

The importance of this kind of demonstration of social work in recruitment was also stressed. In recruiting for agency employment, we, as social workers, must be able to show the same kind of warm acceptance and ability to feel with people that we wish applicants for positions in social work to possess. Unless we can do this we cannot create in others a desire to enter the field we represent. Such an identification on the part of the applicant with a person who represents social work has a positive value in that it indicates his ability to relate to people.

The group pointed out that frequently in the public welfare agency the person who interviews applicants does not make the final decision for acceptance or rejection. This raised the question of whether or not, during the interview, the candidate should be prepared for rejection.

Everyone agreed that it was important for the interviewer to make the distinction, and help the applicant to understand that it is not that the person is rejected, but rather that the particular job is not right for him. The interview can be used to help the applicant to accept "not getting" the job and to handle his feelings regarding this. The interviewer should not let the applicant leave without helping him to anticipate not being given the job, even though his underlying difficulties have not been discussed with him. The interviewer has an obligation (to the applicant as a human being) to accept him as a person, to help him leave the interview with his self-esteem as whole and as intact as possible. Hopefully, he may come to a better understanding of himself during the in-

terview and have some question within himself as to whether this job is right for him.

Thus the interview has a double objective: (1) for the agency, to evaluate what resources the candidate has within himself that would make it possible for him to carry out agency services, and (2) for the applicant, to help him arrive at a clearer understanding as to whether or not this work would help him achieve the objectives he has for himself. The interview, therefore, has its implications for the agency, the applicant, the community, and the profession, and all are interrelated.

## **The Interview and Personality Qualities**

As the group began discussion of the personality qualities needed in a profession which is directed to helping people with social and emotional problems, they accepted the premise that no one is perfect -- that in assessing personality it is largely a matter of the degree of the qualities deemed desirable or limiting in social work learning and performance. Most people have some unresolved conflicts, certain limitations, and also certain strengths and potentialities for growth.

It was agreed, however, that fundamentally in order to help people, a worker must be able to feel positively toward them and have a concern for them. He must be able to make an emotional investment in other people. This calls for warmth and responsiveness on the part of the worker and relative freedom from overpreoccupation with his own problems. Obviously social work has no place for a "hostile" or "punishing" person. Mr. Berengarten shared with the group findings of the Pilot Study which showed how often a person's unresolved conflicts rooted in earlier life experiences, which seemed to have been resolved, are touched off in the first interview with clients who have similar problems. In interviewing, we need to learn not only the nature and degree of the unresolved conflicts of the applicant which will hamper his performance in social work, but also the extent to which he has insight and awareness into his own reactions and feelings and the capacity for further development. As the interviewee understands himself, he can understand others. An applicant must show some capacity not only to understand but also to accept himself, if he is to be accepting of others. A person cannot have esteem for others without self-esteem, and if he is to have self-esteem, he must have been accepted by others,

especially those who have special significance for him within his own family.

In order to help others it is essential that a person be able to relate to a wide range of people, to those in authority, to those who are dependent, to one's peers, to persons of the same sex, of the opposite sex, to children and to adults. He must have the ability to reach out to people and to feel with people. A social conscience, which includes concern for all people and the impulse to better social conditions, as well as the desire to give help on an individual basis, was considered essential.

The group believed that an applicant's matureness of personality is reflected in his ability to give sustained support to others, to bear up under stress, and to use his life's experiences in an integrated way. Obviously no one can be expected to be completely mature. The important thing to know is the nature and degree of personality limitations and strengths as these are reflected in the way the applicant is meeting his life experiences, and in how well he has been able to resolve personal conflicts. The need to determine whether or not he is essentially a well-integrated person, or whether he would be likely to break under the emotionally exacting involvement of himself in helping others that would be required of him in practice, was stressed.

In discussing selection for educational leave, the question of chronological age as a factor in acceptance or rejection was discussed. Mr. Berengarten pointed out that the findings of the Pilot Study showed little correlation between chronological age and successful performance. Regardless of age, the personal qualities of the applicant are of first importance. Rigidity can be present in persons of any age. Maturity can take place rapidly if personal qualities permit. The project has done much to dispel the rigid thinking regarding the stereotype of age. Its findings have been shared with the schools of social work through the previous workshop and perhaps in the future schools may modify their policies in regard to a specific age requirement. Agencies are getting away from the traditional reactions of "You have lived too long" or "You have not lived long enough" and are coming to see people as they function as individuals.

Discussion also centered around intellectual ability. While intellectual ability was considered important in analyzing the significance of facts, using abstract ideas and concepts, and using knowledge diagnostically, over-intellectualization was recognized as a danger signal. The "brilliant" or "intellec-



tual" person must also have, coupled with this, the ability to involve himself emotionally. Examples were given showing the frequency with which the intellectualized person uses his special ability as a defense against emotional involvement.

In connection with identifying personality qualities, the discussion brought out the importance of seeing the personality pattern as a whole. For example, what is the applicant's basic way of responding to a given situation -- by taking hold of the problem? by withdrawing? by resisting? Can he share work with others or must he work alone?

Other important areas of content to be secured in the interview which were discussed in the workshop included:

1. The applicant's motivation for entering the social work field or for choosing the particular field or agency for employment. What is moving the individual in this direction and what are his feelings about it? Sometimes the motive he expresses is at variance with his real motive. Expressed motivations have their value but the interviewer must be able to make inferences regarding underlying forces from the content the applicant presents. In other professions, such as the medical profession, motivation is frequently related to positive identification with a member of the family. This is not so apt to be true with people applying for social work positions. A random sampling of the 432 applicants seen in the Pilot Study showed only 6% who had close relatives engaged in any kind of social work and only 2% who had professionally trained social workers in the family. Interviewers therefore, need to look for other kinds of motivations.

For example, is it that the candidate had been given so much love and acceptance in his growing up that the choice of social work would be a logical extension of his emotional investment in other people? On the other hand, the applicant may be seeking help for himself, may come from an emotionally deprived background, may have the motive of identifying with others who are less advantaged. Essentially the point that was emphasized was the importance of understanding what entering the field may mean for this individual and what it is he can give to it. If he has sustained earlier emotional deprivations, to what extent was he able to overcome or compensate for them so that he can be a helping person to others? If the motivation comes from an over-identification with "the hurt," the interviewer will need to evaluate whether or not the applicant can work with people who are not like himself.

2. Knowledge of previous employment or related experi-

ences of the applicant is important. The attitude of the applicant toward the agency in which he works is a good index of his attitude toward authority in general, since agency structure frequently represents authority. This response may give clues to other aspects of his life in which he operates in relation to authority. If he himself has been in a position of authority, has he used his position constructively? What is his attitude toward his peers with whom he works? What has his school experience meant to him? The individual's relation to teachers, the meaning that separation from family when he entered school or employment had for him, the nature of his extracurricular activities, all give important understanding of the applicant as a person.

3. The understanding of family relationships represents core content, since it is largely through relation to parental figures that the personality is formed. The quality of these relationships throws light on the meaning of present relationships. The interviewer must discover what these relationships involve for the applicant and how they will affect his ability to do the job. Have they been satisfying so that he can reach out to others and give support, or, for example, has his relationship with his parents resulted in a basic conflict with authority so severe that it will affect his relationships with persons in authority or his ability to use authority? The interviewer is looking for recurrent patterns, strengths as well as conflicts that have remained unsolved and that may present limitations in the applicant's ability to do the job. He is looking essentially for the applicant's ability to grow and change. The workshop stressed that it is not what has happened to an individual in the course of his life that is significant, but what this has meant to him and what he has been able to do with his life experiences that tells us his strengths. All experiences have potentials for growth, if the person is equipped to use them in this way.

The nature of family relationships reveals much about the way the applicant's personality was formed -- did the individual have the experience of being loved and of giving love during his formative years? What was the balance in terms of satisfying relationships in the family as between father, mother, siblings? What was the balance of giving and taking, of loving and being loved, of dependence and independence? Was his a fairly normal family or a broken family, and if broken, were there substitutes for the lost parents? A person cannot love unless he has received love -- there is no other way to acquire this ability. If he has not experienced love and security through persons close to him or in substitutive relationships, he will not be able to develop the ca-

capacity to give emotionally of himself in social work.

There is a time in life when dependency is natural and normal. Also, a certain amount of dependency and capacity to trust others must exist if learning is to occur. The interviewer needs to be able to differentiate between normal dependency in adulthood, as in a learning situation, which is constructive and dependency which comes from lack of early satisfactions and which results in lack of self-confidence and arrested ego development. The group considered this point to be especially important for staff who "work alone," as in rural areas, where adaptive ability is especially needed and sufficient ego strength must be present to permit independence.

In relation to the applicant's ego defenses, the interviewer needs to distinguish between defenselessness and undefensiveness. The person whose defenses are weak may immediately reveal self-damaging information which he may or may not know will minimize his chances of being accepted. He often cannot protect himself. The healthy integrated person has his defenses up until he learns it is safe to trust. Through the medium of a positive relationship he is then able to share with the interviewer his real feelings.

The need to make careful analysis of the content of the interview was repeatedly brought out in the case discussions. For example, when an individual verbalizes some insight into his behavior it is important to follow through and to test out whether or not any changes have taken place as a result of this insight. Insight cannot be assumed to exist unless the individual uses it to act differently and the illustrative content of the interview should show how the individual is different or has developed because of such insight.

The importance of looking for growth was also discussed. Interviewers are sometimes misled by the fact that the applicant has shown some growth -- but this growth may not be enough to meet the stresses of the job. Interviewers need to ask themselves, "What is this individual able to do now and what can the agency do in working with his strengths?" They need to be clear as to how far along the way of independence the applicant has come and how far he has yet to go. The fact that he has shown growth is sometimes not enough. The interviewer must see where the applicant is at the present time in the scale of maturity in relation to what he must be in order to do the job.

## Methods and Techniques of Interviewing

Immediately preceding the actual interviews held by the workshop members, discussion centered around how the interview should proceed. The fact was again stressed that the interview should be free-flowing and non-structured. It should be related to the feeling responses of the applicant and the latent meanings these responses have for him rather than to a planned logical sequence. Its difference from "history taking" was obvious. If the interviewer attempts to control the interview by following a planned logical sequence, the interview inevitably becomes segmented and the reaction of the applicant becomes intellectualized.

The importance of dynamically observing the applicant during the interview and of noting the sequence of his responses was stressed. Although the interviewer follows the lead of the applicant, he is not passive. He uses his sensitivity and knowledge to select clues for further exploration of subjects that have particular meaning for the applicant, and for the purpose of the agency. Because the nature and purpose of such an interview is unlike that of a client interview or the conventional employment interview, in which outer aspects of personality are assessed, there was considerable discussion of the technical problems involved in initiating and unfolding interview content which is psychologically focused. The group considered it essential that the applicant have a clear conception of the purpose of the interview and that he be given an opportunity to take the initiative in presenting himself and clarifying his objectives through interaction with an understanding and skillful interviewer. They stated that, in their past experience, if the applicant was slow to mobilize himself to initiate the interview they had a tendency to take over by "explaining the job." Discussion emphasized that this approach shifted the focus away from the main purpose of the interview which was to gain knowledge of the applicant and his potentials for performance in the agency.

Interviewing calls for self-involvement on the part of both the interviewer and the interviewee. For the interviewer it calls for a reorientation of approach and heightens his self-consciousness and self-scrutiny. The interviewer himself should be aware of how the interview affects him. In an interview we often have a tendency (consciously or unconsciously) to identify with persons:



1. Who are like other individuals in our experience, such as a sister, a brother, a friend. This may create a struggle within us to maintain objectivity.
2. Who have had experiences like our own, such as a similar school or work experience -- or a similar hardship.
3. Whom we like or whose attributes represent ideals to us. When this happens, we have the tendency to over-credit them, although this may be unconscious on our part.

Likewise, we may react against persons whom we do not like. When we have prejudices against groups or types of people, we are apt to make stereotypes of them and reject them without seeing them as individuals. We need to be especially alert to such feelings, in order to give the applicant a chance to present himself at his optimum. Because of the high importance of maintaining an objective point of view, an interviewer needs to have previous experience with different kinds of personalities, people of different races, persons with handicaps, etc., so that he does not over-identify or let his intuitive impulses sway him one way or another into subjective judgments. The interviewer needs to have more than just experience as a practitioner; he should have additional experience, such as in supervision, which provides him with a background of knowledge as to how different personalities function in the actual work situation. A study of a closely allied profession was cited which analyzed the kinds of people interviewers tended to over-credit. These were people who made a good physical appearance, who gave good surface responses, and who showed high intelligence. This study, in its follow-up of candidates, found that those who made out best after they were on the job were not as a rule the ones who were most ebulliently out-going, but rather the ones who were more restrained and, while expressing their thoughts and feelings during the interview, did so with a greater economy of words.

The interviewer's role was further discussed in relation to testing out the extent to which a pattern of behavior manifested in the interview and contraindicated for social work would be amenable to change, as in the case, for example, of the interviewee who appears very aggressive and controlling, or of the interviewee who is excessively shy, inarticulate and submissive. With the latter the interviewer may use supportive techniques to help him reduce his anxiety and present himself in a more positive way, if he has strengths. With the applicant who shows aggressive defenses, the interviewer must

learn what his reaction is when control is purposefully taken away and whether his defenses are still sufficiently unstructured so that he can respond positively and communicate emotionally. The group recognized that the utmost in professional social work diagnostic skill is required in order to know when it is safe to test the plasticity or rigidity of defenses, since emotionally burdened people frequently apply to schools and to agencies.

The group gave consideration to how they could interpret the agency job and the administrative aspects of employment to the applicant and at the same time permit the interview to be fluid and focused on personality evaluation for work performance. Because of the organization existing in some States (regional interviewing and central office interviewing), it was suggested that the administrative aspects of the interview might perhaps be separated from the assessment of personality. In any event the administrative aspects should not be permitted to interfere with the natural process of the interview which was designed to assess the candidate's personal qualities.

Recording which reflects the interaction in the interview is an important factor in the process of arriving at a valid assessment. It should be a selective process recording, with the sequence of the unfolding of the interview clearly discernible to a reader. The purpose of this type of recording is to provide a perspective on the interview and so increase the objectivity of the interviewer's assessment of the applicant. While the importance of recording the interview immediately was emphasized, a time interval between the recording and the preparation of the evaluation and recommendation was urged. The interviewer can then see in writing the content of what took place and gain the desired perspective. Another major value of allowing a little time to lapse is that the interviewer is then farther away from the impact of the individual's personality and is freer to make an objective evaluation.

## **Interviewing and the Public Welfare Agency**

As the group considered the foregoing principles of selection in relation to a public welfare agency, questions were raised as to whether they could be applied without modification. Have we a right to inquire into the personal relationships of the applicant, particularly his familial relationships,

and to attempt to understand his personality in its inner as well as outer manifestations in order to determine whether or not he should be employed in a public welfare agency? If so, do we need to prepare the applicant in advance for this kind of interview? How can we interpret this method to the community?

The group expressed the conviction that because of the tremendous responsibility which the agency carries for the people it serves, it has no alternative but to use the method known to be most effective in the selection of staff. They believed this method of assessing personality was valid and was something they had long been searching for. They felt that a similar situation had existed in the field of adoption. Agencies at first had felt uncomfortable in evaluating the personality of adoptive parents in order to determine their ability to carry the responsibility of rearing a child. It was only after agencies had come to a greater realization of their own responsibility for the child that they became convinced of their right and responsibility to evaluate the prospective parents.

It was recognized that more intensive interviewing in the agency, such as had been demonstrated in the workshop, might result in an increased number of rejections on the basis of personality. The question was raised as to what effect this would have on the applicants and on the community. Would the method be accepted by the community? What could be done to help persons who could not accept rejection?

The group felt strongly that the concept of personality assessment as an essential part of selection for employment would have to be accepted first by the top administration and by the community, and that methods of incorporating this concept would have to be accepted within the framework of the agency. This would call for considerable interpretation by persons on different administrative levels.

Members of the group commented that the method of interviewing demonstrated in the workshop differed from what they had already been using only in degree. They felt that it was more objective and required more self-discipline and that it placed greater emphasis on leaving the applicant free to reveal his real feelings about what was important to him and what he wanted for himself, and the relation of this to what would be required of him in the agency. An important point in interpretation should be that, through an interpersonal relationship, the applicant is helped to share with the interviewer information about himself that is pertinent and essential to

his qualifications for employment.

This can be of value to the applicant as well as to the agency. He may see more clearly his own objectives and whether or not this job would help him to achieve them. He senses the interviewer's interest in him as well as in the agency position. The findings of the Pilot Study were used here to show that, when good interviewing is done, the applicant leaves with a positive reaction to the interview and sees it as a shared process, whether he is accepted or rejected.

Exceptions of course will occur, particularly with persons who are emotionally ill and unable to accept the positives for themselves in the interview. The interviewer has a special responsibility for helping such people to work through to some recognition that this particular job is not for them.

A question was asked as to how much help should be given to persons who cannot accept not getting the job. Might they be given an additional interview even though it was clear that they could not be employed? Is this "treatment" of the individual and not a justifiable part of selection? It was agreed that interviewers must never lose sight of the human being even though they must hold to the purpose of the interview, which is to assess personality in relation to employment. In instances where the applicant needs to talk the matter over further, in order to work through problems growing out of the agency interview, the interviewer should be willing to give him an additional interview. But as indicated earlier, a skillful interviewer can often help the applicant anticipate the decision to not accept.

The various series of three interviews each, that were presented for discussion during the workshop, had been most convincing in illustrating method and content that revealed personality.

The sequence of the interviews had meaning. In the first interview the well-integrated applicant tends naturally to present facts about himself as he sees them. This is the thesis. In the second interview, he begins to show he has thought things over and more analysis occurs. The third interview shows more integration of content, insight, and projection of this into purpose and the future learning and work performance. Some movement toward synthesis occurs. If little or no change occurs as the applicant moves from one interview to another -- if subsequent interviews merely repeat the first -- this in itself is analyzed, along with other phases of the content of the interview, in terms of its implications for



ability to grow or for rigidity.

The Pilot Study experience provided considerable assurance that, although the second and third interviews elaborated content they served primarily to confirm the first interview. Usually the first interview, if skillfully done, gave sufficient information which, if interpreted with accuracy, resulted in a sound evaluation of the applicant. Some of the group thought it would be possible in their agency to have multiple interviews, at least in the initial phase while they were getting experience in developing interviewing techniques and competence in assessment. It was emphasized that the other staff persons utilized as members of such a team must have professional training in social work and the technical skills mandatory for such an assignment.

The group agreed that one of the best methods of interpretation to an agency would be interviews conducted within that agency. The members of the present workshop, on their return, might use their own interviews as illustrations, analyzing them, and testing them out by a follow-up on applicants who are subsequently employed as staff members. Similarly, there should be follow-up on staff members who were not selected through the method of dynamic interviewing. Persons who are considered "risks" particularly need to have a follow-through. This will enable the interviewers to learn from their mistakes, to look at the staff in relation to what they bring and in relation to their use in the agency. Examples of interviews in which predictions for good performance had proven to be well founded, as well as those in which obvious mistakes had been made, should be analyzed. It was felt by the group that such experiences could be used, also, within the agency as a basis for discussion and policy formation. The process itself is equally applicable to the whole range of persons coming to the agency -- to persons with professional education and to those who are without professional training.

A formal method for systematic study of the value of dynamic interviews in relation to subsequent performance was discussed. Mr. Berengarten described the research method which is being initiated by some of the schools of social work and which is described in the pamphlet "Student Assessment -- Selection and Continuing Evaluation," a report of the annual meeting of the Council on Social Work Education, 1954. The members of the group expressed great interest in conducting such a self-study which they felt would most likely increase their skills.

The group saw many valuable "side products" for their agencies from this experience, as in the selection and evaluation of foster home applications and in strengthening supervision.

They expressed a desire for consultation from the Federal Bureaus as they implemented the interviewing process in the total selection plan in their agencies. They also felt that regional meetings for the purpose of exchange of ideas between States would be helpful. The Federal Bureaus agreed that consultation would be possible and that various methods, such as regional meetings, would be explored with the regional staffs.

The group asked about the possibility of a "refresher" workshop at sometime in the future. It was thought that this might be tied in with an annual meeting, such as that of the APWA, the National Conference of Social Work, or the Council on Social Work Education.

At the termination of the workshop each member was invited by the Executive Director of the Council on Social Work Education to join its National Roster of Interviewers consisting of persons in social work education and practice. The purpose of the roster is to provide all the accredited schools of social work in the United States and Canada with a qualified corps of field admissions interviewers, so that applicants to schools of social work can be interviewed as part of their total application process. The roster plan indicates the trend among the professional schools and supports the premise that candidates are not being selected for a particular school of social work in one local region, but rather for the profession as a whole.

The leaders of the workshop expressed great satisfaction with the participants selected, because they reflected so well both the personal qualities and the professional competence imperative for fulfillment of the assignment. Their remarkable identification with each other and with the leaders helped to bring about a quick readiness to explore together the complex task of adapting knowledge of the psychodynamics of human behavior and skills in interviewing to the realities involved in their on-going jobs in public welfare. The calibre of their participation in discussion and in the actual interviewing of applicants during the workshop attested to the integration of their professional learning and experience. Their ability to assimilate the highlights of the content of the Pilot Study and rapidly apply the principles to their task in selection showed a high degree of imaginativeness and creative thinking.

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